

I rise today to recognize the commencement of Ramadan, which begins tonight at dusk. Most Americans are not familiar with Ramadan. In New Jersey, with our diverse, cosmopolitan population, we understand well the significance this month has for America's millions of Muslims and for Muslims around the globe. Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, a time of fasting, prayer, spiritual renewal, and contemplation. The observance of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam, and it is a time when adherents to the faith give generously to charities both locally and around the world. Ramadan is a time to strengthen ties to family and community in the form of meals shared among friends and neighbors at sunset, when the fast is broken. During Ramadan, our American-Muslim neighbors in the 12th District volunteer their time at area soup kitchens in places like Trenton and New Brunswick.

It has been my privilege to represent the American-Muslim population in Central Jersey, a vibrant, thriving community of doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, small business owners, entrepreneurs, U.S. servicemen and women, and working class Americans. Their concerns are the same as those of many Americans--maintaining high standards of education to ensure that their children can compete globally, sustaining their small businesses, rebuilding our economy, and seeking new energy sources to reduce waste.

There is no greater testament to the American way of life than the fact that Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus--people of all faiths--live and work side-by-side in our local communities across the nation. The vast majority of our Muslim neighbors reject the extremist ideologies that have taken root on the fringes of Islam, tarnishing the name of that religion. As I visit with my friends in the American-Muslim community of Central New Jersey, I see clearly that the relationship between American democratic values and a moderate Islam has been, and will continue to be, mutually beneficial.

I look forward to participating in Ramadan iftaars in the 12th District and to continuing to serve American-Muslims and members of all the faith communities in Central New Jersey.